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ABSTRACT

The Urban Community Colleges Transfer Opportunities Program (UCCTOP) was initiated in 1983 to stimulate the transfer of minority students from community colleges to universities. Collecting data on the effects of the UCCTOP activities proved to be one of the most difficult aspects of the project as community colleges typically do not have reliable data on student transfer. Most community colleges rely on the universities to which students transfer for data, with varying results. Even in states in which a central agency collects transfer data, there can be problems if individual campuses define transfers differently or if the existing data are out of date or difficult to interpret. UCCTOP colleges' efforts to gather information on associate degrees awarded and student transfers reveal more about data inconsistencies and the force of external influences than about UCCTOP's effects. According to the data submitted, the number of degrees awarded increased between 1981-82 and 1985-86 at every college except Miami-Dade Community College (Florida), which showed a 51% decline. The number of transfer students showed a similarly steep decline at Miami-Dade, a strong increase at the Community College of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania), and level or inconsistent patterns at the other UCCTOP colleges. Findings, though difficult to compare or interpret because of numerous errors, missing data, and variant sources of data and definitions, suggest that (1) external forces strongly affect associate degree completion and transfer rates; (2) the effects of programs such as UCCTOP must be assessed after several years have elapsed; and (3) the comparison of transfer rates between colleges is precarious. (MDB)

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TECHNICAL REPORT ON THE

URBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES TRANSFER OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM

Submitted to the Ford Foundation

by The Center for the Study of Community Colleges

June 10, 1988

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Technical Report on UCCTOP

Submitted to FORD Foundation

By Center for the Study of Community Colleges

On June 10, 1988

The Ford Foundation-sponsored Urban Community Colleges Transfer Opportunity Program (UCCTOP) began in 1983 with the purpose of stimulating the transfer of minority students from community colleges to universities. The Foundation made initial awards of $25,000 to each of 24 community colleges and subsequent larger awards to several institutions in that group. The largest awards went to Cuyahoga, La Guardia, Miami-Dade, Philadelphia, and South Mountain community colleges. These five, designated the UCCTOP II group, were to continue and expand their efforts at minority student transfer and to provide data revealing the effects of the grant-stimulated activities.

Collecting the data proved one of the most difficult aspects of the project. For numerous reasons, community colleges typically do not have access to reliable data on student transfer:

- Most of them depend on the universities that receive the students to send information about those who transferred; some universities comply readily, others do not.

- The data that the universities supply are frequently incomplete; the receiving institutions may or may not track those students entering in other than the fall term, those entering short of junior-class standing, those who had a break in attendance between community college exit and university entry, those who transferred in from out of state, and so on.

- In some states the higher education system coordinates all data on students but definitions may vary between the different university branches.

- The state-provided data tapes may be out of date and difficult to interpret because of shifting criteria.

- The community colleges that conduct their own student followup studies suffer the difficulties common to most such studies: insufficient response rates; imprecise questions; inconsistent choice of students to survey, e.g., graduates only or all non-returning students.

- The data collected in a multi-college district may be difficult to disaggregate to the level of a single campus.

These types of problems hampered the UCCTOP II colleges when they attempted to provide data on the gender and ethnicity of the associate degree recipients over the prior five years, the number of terms that students were enrolled, the student's transfer intentions, the number transferring and receiving bachelor degrees, and relationships among those variables. The data they did offer were tabulated and summarized in An Assessment of Urban Community Colleges Transfer Opportunities Program, submitted to the Ford Foundation by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges on April 30, 1988. The report that follows offers an

abstract of two of the most pertinent indicators of program effects (associate degrees awarded and the number of students transferring), a review of the practical problems in obtaining those data, and an estimate of internal and external forces affecting degree awards and transfer rates in the five institutions.

College Data

A review of the data that each college supplied reveals little on UCCTOP program effects, more on data inconsistencies and the force of external influences.

Enrollment in academic transfer programs at Miami-Dade, North Campus, declined by 11 percent between 1981-82 and 1985-86. Enrollment of Blacks declined by 10 percent and that of Hispanics by four percent. But the number receiving associate degrees declined much more markedly. Degrees awarded over that five year span declined by 49 percent. Degrees received by Black students declined by 57 percent and by Hispanic students, by 43 percent; degrees awarded to White students declined by 57 percent. The total number of students transferring declined also. In 1981-82 55 percent of the students who received a degree transferred while in 1984-85 the percentage of transfers had dropped to 46. Miami-Dade transfers to public universitities in Florida totaled 2121 in 1982-83. In 1985-86, 1192 students transferred.

The data from South Mountain Community College cannot be used to draw inferences about the program because the college is too new for trends to have been established. South Mountain awarded Associate in Arts degrees to three males and seven

females in 1981-82. By 1985-86 the numbers had increased to nine males and 19 females. Thirty-three students with Associate in Arts degrees and 39 who had earned at least 24 units at the college but no degree transferred to universities between 1982 and 1986.

The total number of students transferring from the Community College of Philadelphia declined by around 10 percent between 1982-83 and 1984-85. The number of Black students transferring declined by 20 percent, the number of White students transferring, by 15 percent. The number of associate degrees awarded to Blacks increased by eight percent between 1981-82 and 1985-86; the awards for Hispanics stayed the same; the associate degrees awarded to Whites increased by 87 percent.

In 1985-86 Philadelphia awarded only 23 Associate in Arts degrees and 24 Associate in Science degrees; the Associate in Applied Science and the Associate in General Studies are the degrees of choice. Only 12 students transferred with an Associate in Arts degree and 11 students with an Associate in Science degree in 1985-86, whereas 465 students with AAS or AGS degrees transferred. The number of Blacks transferring during the same time period dropped from 232 to 183, a 21 percent decline.

Cuyahoga's data show an increase in the number of associate degrees awarded but a decrease in the number of students transferring. When transfers with AA degrees are compared with those with AAS or other degrees, the data show that the former group decreased over the five-year span (9%) while the latter sector showed an increase of 16 percent. The number transferring

with at least 24 credits but no degree decreased by nine percent.

The LaGuardia data indicate that the number of Associate of Arts degrees awarded declined from 1981 to 1986, whereas other degrees increased; AS recipients increased 41 percent over the years and females, 26 percent. Male AAS recipients were up by 23 percent; females by 19 percent; and for the total number of respondents, all degrees awarded showed an increase of seven percent.

In summary, the UCCTOP II colleges submitted the following data:

Associate Degrees Awarded Annually (AA, AS, AAS, Other)

	1981-82	82-83	83-84	84-85	85-86	Percent change over 4 years
Cuyahoga	1657	1675	1859	1806	1871	+ 13
La Guardia	840	941	930	985	901	+ 7
Miami-Dade N	2412	1873	1725	1261	1179	- 51
Philadelphia	799	928	895	836	1058	+ 32
So. Mountain	14	34	39	44	39	+180

Number of Students Transferring Annually After Earning a Degree or at Least 24 Units

	1981-82	82-83	83-84	84-85	85-86	Percent change over 4 years
Cuyahoga	1096	1137	1127	1119	1064	- 3
LaGuardia	387	437	507	461	N/A	+ 19
Miami-Dade North	5236	2121	1774	1399	1192	- 77
Philadelphia	252	282	432	411	488	+ 94
So. Mountain	N/A	7	23	25	13	+ 85

Data Difficulties

According to the tables, the number of degrees awarded between 1981-1982 and 1985-1986 increased in every college except at Miami-Dade North, which showed a precipitous decline. The number of students transferring showed a similarly steep decline at Miami, a strong increase at Philadelphia, and a level or inconsistent pattern in the other three colleges.

What do these data tell? They cannot reasonably be aggregated nor can comparisons be made between colleges because of the inconsistencies of the reports. Some of the data are simply erroneous: Philadelphia reported a total of 338 students transferring "by gender", 488 "by degree status". This is but one of the many reports where one set of data does not correspond with another coming from the same institution. The colleges collected these data in different ways for different purposes and cross-checking typically reveals numerous errors.

Missing data represent a second type of problem. The colleges were asked to supply data on the number of students transferring with no degree but with at least 24 units earned. Philadelphia was unable to supply that information. South Mountain offered complete figures for transfers to Arizona State University, incomplete figures for transfers to other institutions. These types of missing data suggest an underestimate on the number of students actually transferring.

A third problem lay in the variant sources of data and definitions used at the different colleges. As example, when asked about the number of students transferring, La Guardia supplied data based on the percent of the prior year graduates who

responded to a January survey, Cuyahoga surveyed its graduates in June. Miami-Dade relied on a State University System data tape.

The outcome of this data collection effort reflects the unevenness of available data on community college students. Data on enrollment and degrees awarded are imperfect but generally attainable. All colleges -- with the exception of South Mountain -- were able to supply information on enrollment in academic/transfer programs and on the ethnicity of students in those programs. In addition, data on the number of associate degrees awarded and on the ethnicity of recipients were in most cases at hand. These figures at least provide indices of minority participation in transfer education.

But information on the number of students transferring and on the subsequent academic success of students after transfer is decidedly unreliable. Though college personnel can name the senior institutions that receive the largest proportion of transferring students, mechanisms for identifying and tracking transfer students are primitive at best. Some colleges receive reports from the major receiving institutions but most are on their own, with each trying to gather data from a number of senior institutions or through follow-up surveys of former students. The colleges have taken several approaches to these data collection problems.

Cuyahoga Community College bases its transfer data on a survey conducted each June. The survey asks the degree recipients if they plan to transfer, and the college uses the survey responses to estimate the number who will. Thus, if 50 percent of

the respondents indicate that they intend to transfer, Cuyahoga estimates that 50 percent of the degree recipients will transfer. The figures reported by Cuyahoga, then, are estimated projections of transfers and not actual figures, and students transferring without an associate degree are not included in the tabulation.

Miami-Dade Community College receives information about students enrolled in the Florida State University System. The System provides Miami-Dade with a computer tape containing the social security numbers of students at the state universities. These numbers are matched with the social security numbers of Miami-Dade graduates to determine the number who have gone on to the nine state universities. Miami-Dade has also tried to determine the number of former students who have transferred to neighboring private institutions by supplying social security numbers and asking the colleges to match the numbers with those of their own students. However many students do not have social security members and are thus lost to the records.

LaGuardia Community College has used follow-up surveys to estimate the percentage of graduates who transfer to senior institutions. The surveys are conducted each January to assess the activities of those graduating with associate degress in the previous academic year. Since most students transferring from LaGuardia enter senior institutions within the City University of New York, an attempt has been made to search CUNY computer records for data on former LaGuardia students. This has had only mixed results because data files that are two years or older are routinely archived, hence practically inaccessible.

The Community College of Philadelphia utilizes annual surveys of graduates and non-returning students. Its reports emphasize information on the respondents who transfer to Philadelphia-area four-year colleges, in particular the progress they are making at the senior institutions.

South Mountain depends on Arizona State for its information. It receives data on the number of former South Mountain students transferring to ASU as well as on the number of community college credits transferred for each student, the number of credits earned by each student during his or her first university semester, and the post-transfer grade point average earned by each student. ASU also provides information on the number of former South Mountain students who receive bachelor's degrees. But other receiving institutions are not nearly as cooperative in sending information.

Conclusions

Three sets of conclusions may be reached concerning the data supplied. The first is that external forces affect associate degree completion and transfer rates to a marked degree. These external forces may be intense, as when the State of Florida imposed a College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) to be passed before any student could receive an associate degree and/or transfer. The severe drop in degree awards and transfers from Miami-Dade can only be explained in this light.

The second conclusion is that the effects of a program such as UCCTOP can only be estimated after several years have elapsed. It takes time to implement the changes and for a sufficient number of students to be influenced by them. For example, some

of the colleges used UCCTOP funds to strengthen interventions in the high schools. No less than four years and, on the average, more likely seven years go by before a tenth grader completes a community college program and transfers to a university. And, by then, external forces have undoubtedly come into play: community demographics have shifted, state rules governing college admissions have changed, university standards for transfer have been modified, the college's own graduation requirements, even the types of degrees they award, have been altered. A community college - directed program's effects are perforce magnified or reduced by events well beyond its managers' control.

The third conclusion is that comparing transfer or associate degree production rates between colleges is most precarious. The differences in definition of "transfer" and the missing data are so pronounced that it is difficult even to estimate the transfer rate for a single college. And clearly the transfer rate cannot be keyed to associate degree production; too many students transfer without the degree, start at the university, transfer to the community college and receive a degree before going back to the university, and so on.

This issue of data collection may be amenable to intervention. One way of dealing with it is for a process to be initiated whereby a group of institutions agree to effect uniform data collection definitions and procedures, especially for the purpose of documenting associate degree awards and transfer rates. A small group of colleges that have been engaged in deliberate efforts to collect and interpret such data could be

brought together as a consortium to codify a set of standards that could then be used as a benchmark against which all other student data collection procedures would be measured. The most visible colleges and the national associations concerned with community college education would welcome such resolution.

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